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The integrity of the prophetic gift

By GERHARD F. HASEL

In the prophetic gift we have a firm foundation for our faith and a revelation of God's will for our lives.

The prophetic gift is one of the most profound gifts of God to the human family. A prophet is a person chosen by God to communicate authentically and authoritatively the divine will and purpose through the processes of supernatural revelation and divine inspiration. While there are many facets to the task of the prophet, one of the outstanding aspects is the predictive element. Thus prophets are both the proclaimers of divine messages and the predictors of events that are to take place in the near future, the more distant future, or even the very distant future. Predictive prophecy and historical fulfillment are essential parts of God's Biblical revelation. In this way God could address through His inspired instrument the prophet's own situation, as well as the near or distant future.

The fact of predictive prophecy demonstrates beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Lord is all-powerful and in ultimate control of history. The Creator of the world (Gen. 1:1-3; John 1:1-3, 14; Heb. 1:1-3) also is the Lord over history (Dan. 2:1-45; 7:1-27; 12:1-3). The prophet Isaiah emphasized this in the following way: "For I am God, there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all

My good pleasure.' . . . Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it" (Isa. 46:9-11, N.A.S.B.).

In His grace God has chosen to speak and to declare the end from the beginning so that His followers may know what will take place. The God who in the beginning started history also knows and controls history, directing His plan of salvation to its final goal of a new heaven and a new earth (chap. 65:17; 66:22, 23; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

Some people may have the impression that the predictive element of the Bible is small or limited, when compared with the total content of the Bible. But an investigation of the predictive material contained in Scripture shows that this is not the case. It has been suggested that out of the total of 31,124 verses of the Bible, 8,352 are predictions—5,457 straightforward predictions and 2,895 typological predictions. This means that almost 27 percent of the Bible is predictive in nature.

Reliability an issue

The reliability of Bible prophecy is an important issue. After the assassination attempts on the President of the United States and the Pope, there were several reports that certain individuals had predicted these events. The curious fact is that these "predictions" were made known after the deplorable events occurred. Bible prophecy does not function in this way. Before the events happened or are to happen, divine predictions were communicated to the prophets, and they were carefully recorded. The mark of a true prophet is clearly stated: "'When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken presumptuously'" (Deut. 18:22, N.A.S.B.). The criterion of the truth of predictive prophecy rests in its historical fulfillment.

The Bible is such a vast reservoir of information about prophetic predictions and their fulfillment that we can mention but a few. The prediction that God would give to Abraham's descendants the Promised Land was made first to Abraham (Gen. 12:7), then repeated to him (Gen. 13:14, 15; 15:7, 18; 17:8), to Isaac (Gen. 26:2-4), to Jacob (Gen. 28:13, 15), and to Moses (Ex. 3:8, 17; 6:6-8).

By the time of the death of Joshua the Lord had fulfilled His predictions about the reception of the Promised Land, so that the Biblical record could state explicitly: "Not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:45, R.S.V.).

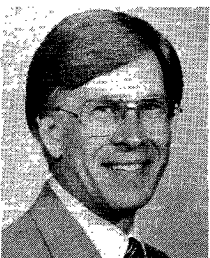
When Jericho was destroyed the prediction was made that its rebuilder would do so at the loss of his oldest and youngest sons (chap. 6:26). About 500 years later the fulfillment took place (1 Kings 16:34) exactly as predicted.

Nathan prophesied that David's son would succeed him on the throne and build the Temple (2 Sam. 7:12, 13) if his son would be faithful (1 Kings 2:4; 6:12). In his son Solomon "'the Lord . . . fulfilled His word which He spoke'" (chap. 8:20, N.A.S.B.).

The prophet Ahijah predicted that ten tribes would be taken away from Solomon (chap. 11:11-13, 32-37), and it was fulfilled exactly as stated (chap. 12:15-19). A prophecy in the time of Jeroboam foretold that a descendant of David named Josiah would act against the altar at Bethel (chap. 13:2, 32). About 300 years later King Josiah fulfilled "the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed" (2 Kings 23:16).

Only in one other instance does a Biblical prediction identify a person by name a long time before he appeared on the scene of history. Isaiah refers to Cyrus, who would decree that Jerusalem be rebuilt (Isa. 44:28; 45:1-7), an event that took place about 150 years later (Ezra 1:1-4).

The prophecy that the kingdom of the



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ten tribes of Israel would be taken from “this good land” and scattered “beyond the [Euphrates] river” (1 Kings 14:15) was fulfilled by Assyria about 200 years later (2 Kings 17:6, 7, 22, 23). Such examples could be multiplied many times over.

These and other examples in the Old Testament reveal several beautiful truths: (1) The Lord gave the predictions through His servants the prophets and fulfilled His predictions in history (1 Kings 8:20; 12:15; 2 Sam. 7:25), so none of His predictions and promises failed (Joshua 21:45; 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56; 2 Kings 10:10). (2) The predictions were fulfilled in history in detail, point by point, so that every feature counts in its fulfillment. (3) Some predictions were fulfilled immediately (1 Kings 13:5; 13:24; 14:18; 17:6, 15), others within a few years (chap. 18:1; 22:1), others decades (2 Kings 9:24; 9:35, 36; 10:7) or centuries later (chap. 17:6, 7, 22, 23). But whenever they were fulfilled it was with uncanny exactness. Thus the Lord establishes that He is Lord of time and history and that His revelation can be trusted.

Messianic prophecies

Messianic prophecies interlace the Old Testament from its first pages onward. The earliest Messianic prophecy appeared from the mouth of God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15) after the entry of sin. From then on Messianic predictions came at various times and through various prophets. Indeed, the proof from the Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth was the predicted Messiah, or Christ, was a powerful means used by the disciples and apostles for convincing the Jews of the truth of Christianity. The apostle Paul “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:28, N.A.S.B.).

Each new Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament complements and supplements previous ones, revealing aspects and details vital for the identity of the future Messiah. Genesis 3:15 predicts that He who would come of the seed of the woman would crush the head of Satan. Isaiah 11:1 states that He would come from the family of Jesse. Isaiah 7:14 reveals that He would be born of a virgin. Micah 5:2 claims that He would have to be born in a specific

town, Bethlehem Ephrathah in Judah (and not in the other Bethlehem, the one in Galilee; see Joshua 19:15). Hosea 11:1 says that “out of Egypt I called My son” (N.A.S.B.), indicating in typological prediction that as Israel was called from Egypt, so Jesus, who is Himself the embodiment of all true Israel, as “son” also would be called out of Egypt. Isaiah 53 reveals that Jesus was to die a substitutionary death for sinners as the Suffering Servant. Daniel 9:24-27 reveals with uncanny exactness the time of Christ’s first coming.

Many other Messianic prophecies could be added. Each and every aspect of the Messianic prophecies was to be fulfilled and, indeed, was fulfilled in the One who is the Christ. The beauty of it all is that the coming of the Messiah, His birth, infancy, life and work, suffering, death, and resurrection, even His installation as heavenly High Priest—all took place exactly in fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions. Thus we know who Jesus of Nazareth is. He is the promised Christ (Messiah) of the Scriptures, in whom all the sacrificial system found its fulfillment. He is the promised Saviour and Redeemer, in whom and through whom God reconciles the world unto Himself. Jesus Christ is the surety of our redemption.

As we look back over the centuries and see how God has brought about His will, fulfilled His predictive prophecies, and worked out His plan of redemption, we have confidence that

the predictions that yet are to be fulfilled will surely come to pass. The dream of Daniel 2 reveals the succession of four world empires, the last of which is followed by the iron-clay period of divided kingdoms. As we observe in history the detailed fulfillment, we are certain that the stone-kingdom, which will destroy all earthly powers, will also be established as the kingdom of God that will last throughout eternity (verses 34, 35, 44, 45). This kingdom is of divine origin, eternal duration, and universal extent. It brings about a cataclysmic end to every world kingdom, while it “will itself endure forever” (verse 44, N.A.S.B.).

Vision expands and supplements

The vision of Daniel 7 expands and supplements the dream of Daniel 2, emphasizing the investigative pre-Advent judgment in preparation for the handing over of the kingdom of God to the saints (chap. 7:21, 22, 24-27). In Daniel 8 appears another vision, one that enlarges upon aspects of the former. It pinpoints the time element of the pre-Advent judgment and reveals additional aspects of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. The vision of Daniel 11-12 reaches from the time of the Persian period to the time of trouble when Michael shall stand up to rescue His faithful remnant people (chap. 12:1) and death will be overcome through the resurrection (verses 2, 3). The amazing fulfillment of portions of these dreams and visions is the guaran-



Every aspect of the Messianic prophecies was fulfilled in the One who is the Christ.

tee that the aspects that as yet remain unfulfilled will surely come to pass.

The Bible speaks clearly about conditional prophecy. The promised blessings made to Israel were conditional upon obedience (Lev. 26:1-33; Deut. 28:1-37), in harmony with the conditional nature of God's covenant with His people. Prophecies about the destruction of a nation can be averted if that nation genuinely repents from its evil (Jer. 18:7, 8); conversely, the nation to which blessings are to come from the Lord will not experience them "if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice" (verse 10, N.A.S.B.).

While the conditional element of prophecy must be carefully studied, it clearly goes against the plain intent of Bible prophecy to suggest that all prophecy is conditional. There was nothing conditional in the Messianic

prophecies. There is nothing conditional about the historical outline visions of Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, 11-12, with their sequence of successive world empires and the events leading up to "the time of the end" (chap. 8:17; cf. 8:19, 26; 11:40; 12:1, 4, 9, 13), when the everlasting kingdom that will never be destroyed (chap. 2:34, 35, 44, 45; 7:14, 18, 27; 12:1-3) will be ushered in.

Students of the Word of God, with its rich treasure of predictive prophecies and their fulfillment, thus are assured of the truthfulness of the divine revelation. Inspiration provides its own testimony to the veracity and accuracy of the prophetic gift. In looking back we can see how God has worked out His predictions with astounding accuracy. This gives us full comfort and a sure anticipation of the fulfillment of events that are yet to transpire until we share in the glory of a new heaven and a new

earth in the presence of God and our Lord and Saviour.

In the prophetic gift we have a firm foundation for our faith and a revelation of the will of God for our lives as we serve Him who is the world's hope. The utterances of the prophets provide divine truth that gives comfort, guidance, and power for a dynamic Christian life today. Through the prophetic gift we can be sure of a future that will extend throughout eternity. □

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the purpose of predictive prophecy?
2. Our reading for today mentions many predictions from the Old Testament. Can you think of some New Testament predictions?
3. Did Ellen White predict any events? If so, give examples.
4. How may we tell which prophecies are conditional?
5. Which Bible characters were foretold by name many years before their birth?

Tuesday, October 26

Ellen White: Defense against error and apostasy

By V. NORSKOV OLSEN

The apostle Paul gives the following pastoral counsel: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. . . . Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:13-16). The purpose of special spiritual gifts within the church is stated as follows: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no

more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. . . . But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:12-15).

Ellen G. White, as one who ministered the Word and was endowed with spiritual gifts in accord with the pattern of New Testament church life, fulfilled the Pauline injunctions just quoted.

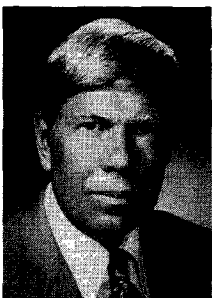
Belief in God's leadership

The formative and formulative period of what became the Seventh-day Adventist Church was from 1844 until the time of organization in 1862-1863. Although our forebears did not have church organization, finances, or unity, they had a strong belief in God's leadership. Through Bible study and Bible conferences, marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit, they reached consensus and agreement. During those days Ellen White was a unifying force and remained so throughout her life.

By the middle of the 1850s the

doctrinal foundation was laid. It was referred to as "a firm platform," "a solid, immovable platform," the "pillars of truth," "the old landmarks," "the great waymarks," or "the present truth." The foundation truths were five: (1) the imminent advent of Christ; (2) the binding claims of the seventh-day Sabbath as a part of the immutable law of God; (3) the theological significance of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 as related to the historical Advent Movement; (4) the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary as our mediator, advocate, priest, and judge (a special emphasis was placed on the pre-Advent judgment as a significant aspect of Christ's heavenly administration); and (5) death as a sleep, and the conditional immortality of the soul. We may refer to these specifics as structural or constitutive truths for the new movement. Ellen G. White identified herself with this "present truth" from the very beginning and continued to do so during the ensuing years until her death in 1915.

In the development of present truth it



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